

# THE STORY OF ROWNEY GREEN VILLAGE HALL 1920 - 2009

– Written by the late John Corbett

## THE HUT, 1920

In 1920, after the First World War, Mr. Albert Wheeler, who then resided at 'The Ferns,' had the great foresight to purchase for Rowney Green a second-hand Army Hut. It arrived at Alvechurch by rail from Barnes, Middlesex, and was carted from Alvechurch Station by Frank Satchwell using Edgar Quinney's horse and cart.

So, in 1920, in recognition of the end of the First World War, Rowney Green had its own Village Hall, known as Rowney Green Peace Memorial Hall, complete with coke stoves for heating, paraffin lamps for lighting and bucket and seat toilet arrangements in a lean-to annex at the rear.

“The army hut was carted from Alvechurch Station using Edgar Quinney's horse and cart”

This Hall was always referred to as 'The Hut.' In the course of time The Hut passed from private to public ownership and was run by a committee on very similar lines to our present Hall.



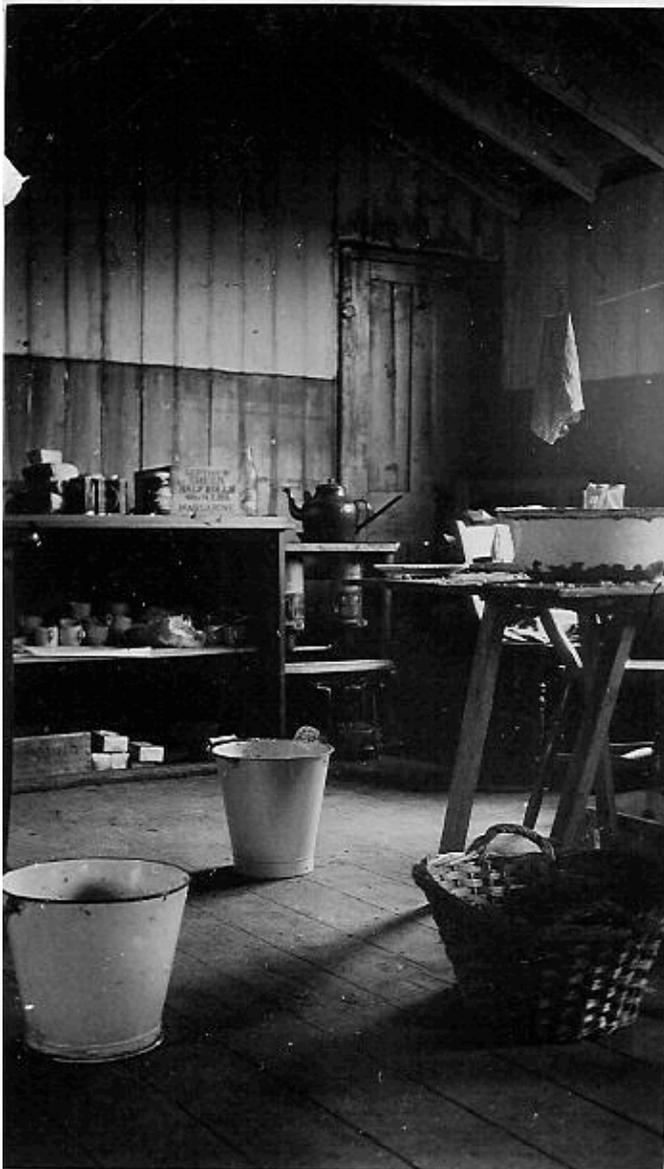
St Joseph's RC Camp outside The Hut in the 1920s

The Hut was simply one large rectangular room, 60 ft. x 30 ft. One corner was used as the kitchen with a Valor stove, later replaced by two electric stoves. A three quarter billiard table, purchased at a sale by Edgar Quinney (and ultimately paid for at 3d a game), acted as the kitchen worktop and serving counter. This arrangement enabled the voluntary staff to participate in whatever was going on in the hall, although at times, the boiling kettles and washing-up noises added little to the merit of the function.

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It was with some misgiving that the 'staff' learned that the kitchen was to be separated from the main building when the new hall was planned. Sliding glass windows were insisted upon!



The stoves were a focal point at which people gathered, leaning on the guards while waiting for an event to commence. The stoves often smoked, the pipes got red-hot and once the floor set on fire, but they were always regarded with great affection. The first person arriving at the hall would put the kettle on the stove ready for tea making in about two hours. During the plays there would suddenly be a hissing and spluttering and a tip-toeing to the stove to remove the kettle. This was a sign for the actors to 'speak up'.

There was permanent wall seating, and for large functions chairs had to be hired.

The portable stage was always a cause of controversy. It consisted of timber planks, which had been purchased from disused exhibition stands at Bingley Hall. These had been transported, piecemeal, by Frank Hale, son of the local schoolmistress, on his motorbike. The planks were supported on trestles, boxes or anything handy, and the onus for dismantling the stage after each play, rehearsal or concert, was placed securely on the users.

An occasion was recalled when Frank Hale, Norrie Harris, Slim Smith, and Fred Edden erected the stage by candle-light and activities were abruptly concluded after midnight when the candles burned out.

### Inside The Hut during a camp in 1925

In these early days paraffin wick lamps suspended from the ceiling lighted The Hut. Paraffin lamps placed on benches below the stage level arranged the stage lighting. A report in the 'Redditch Indicator' of an early play spoke of the 'Electrician' turning wicks up and down when lighting control was called for. Any augmented special lighting required was met by borrowing the brighter paraffin lamps from the Chapel.

During the 'Twenties and 'Thirties, dances, which were very popular, often went on until the early hours of the morning - the snag being that the lamps required filling at about midnight - so along came the loyal Secretary/Caretaker, Tom Powell, with his paraffin can and funnel, and while the dancers had a breather from a set of lancers, he would re-fill all the lamps.

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Frank Hale who fixed up a motorcar engine to drive a generator to supply current at car voltage, feeding suitable car bulbs with tinfoil reflectors, provided the advent of electric lighting for the stage around 1925.

One of the oldest memories of the Hut was having to fetch water for tea and washing up, from the pump at Mr. Newey's Cottage, which stood on the corner of Chapel Lane, now occupied by 'Mavan.' Happily, the pump is still there.

“The worn floor  
was turned over,  
board by board,  
and re-laid”

In the records of October 1931 there is a note that the Committee decided to install a water supply by catching water from the roof if a receptacle could be provided at a reasonable cost - Mr. Hale to obtain and fit spouting, Mr. Wiggin to provide barrels.

Elsans replaced the bucket and seat toilets, firstly and finally some cloakrooms were built on at the back containing the real thing. However, when a play was in progress, it was necessary to

approach these from outside. Recorded activities in The Hut include an early Flower Show and Sports Day held on 22nd August 1922. The Rowney Green Dance Committee ran very successful dances, admission 1/6d and were asked to bring 6d for refreshments which were pooled. The committee provided tea. Music was first a piano played by Mr. Fourt, later by 'three instrumentalist schoolboys from Redditch Secondary School, and finally, the three piece 'Black Diamond Dance Band' 30/- per evening. The profit made at these dances was used to buy the much-needed teaspoons, buckets, towels etc. for the Hall.



The rather youthful committee spent happy Sunday mornings clearing up the hall, making coffee and eating the leftover cakes from the night before.

Mrs. Chalmers, who insisted on the boys wearing white gloves and behaving in a gentlemanly manner, ran young people's Dancing Classes. Many of us owe our love of dancing to this lady who was a very beautiful dancer.

The Women's Institute was formed in 1925. There was a Men's Club, Children's Club, Tennis Club, British Legion, Social Club, Cricket Club, Shakespearean Society and Extra-mural Classes.

Inside The Hut during a camp in 1925

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The Hut was the centre for all food production meetings throughout the wartime and saw much service in this connection.

One of the most delightful ways in which The Hut was used was when Mr and Mrs J H Randall organised Summer Holiday Camps for under-privileged children from Birmingham.

“The Hut was taken down and sold to Barrett’s of Feckenham for £100”



Boys from Aston School, led by Hugh Randall, in the 1920s outside The Hut

Shortly after The Hut was opened, Mrs Wiggan of Bordesley Hall donated an excellent library. This was housed in specially constructed cupboards in the Committee Room, a screened-off corner just inside the front entrance. This became, in effect, the first Public Lending Library in the village.

After The Hut had been in use for about thirty years, the worn floor was turned over, board-by-board, and re-laid by Bill Graham. Concrete steps replaced the worn out wooden ones so that, with the coming of electricity and main water supplies, the old hall was able to carry on being the hub of the village until the end of the Spring season of 1959.

The hut was taken down and sold to Barrett’s of Feckenham for £100, and there was a feeling of sadness as if a good old friend had left the village. This was not only felt by local residents, but by many people living well outside the area who loved to come to the “Do’s” at Rowney Green. There was an atmosphere, which was unique, and the most wonderful thing is that it lives on in our present Hall.

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## THE NEW HALL, 1960

At the end of the Second World War in September 1945 at a public meeting, it was decided that Rowney Green should have its own Peace Memorial and that this should take the form of a New Peace Hall.



### Rowney Green School and footings of the new Peace Hall

From then on, with Fred Hughes as Chairman and firstly Mrs. Mollie Newbould and later Miss Linda Poole as Secretary, the New Peace Hall Committee was formed. During the next fifteen years some 69 meetings were held. Many schemes were investigated in depth but had to be abandoned owing to many factors including National economic stringency such as the re-armament programme in 1953. Finally, in 1957, negotiations were commenced with Messrs. Launer Ltd. of York for construction of the present hall.

Everyone worked hard to raise funds for the new hall, which cost approximately £6,500. Two thirds of the money was raised by donations, ranging from £100 to one appreciated gift of five weeks' retirement pension, and by money-raising efforts, and the balance came from a £2,000 Government Grant and £500 donated by the Worcestershire County Council.

In June 1959, immediately the old hall was removed, closely watched by all, work began on the new one. On 16th January 1960, Mr. Godfrey Baseley of the BBC performed the opening ceremony. It was a wonderful day for everyone.

The Chairman referred with affection to the two original founders of the first hall - Mr. A E Wheeler and Mr. E G Quinney, - who were present at the opening, and to two greatly loved workers no longer with us - Mr. J H Randall, whose memorial would be in the form of wrought-iron gates at the entrance, and Mr. N Harris, whose memorial was a beautiful oak table.

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18<sup>th</sup> August 1960 – at the dedication of the Memorial Gates in memory of Mr. Randall senior

“Everyone worked hard to raise funds for the hall which cost £6,500”

Mr. Baseley, in his opening speech, mentioned how he and his father helped to form the Rowney Green Shakespearean Society. He then opened the door with a special key which was then framed for display in the main hall.

The Opening Day was concluded in true Rowney Green style with an evening to suit all. A play 'Doctor's Delight' by the Dramatic Society, items by the Ladies Choir, and a real gala dance to finish off - ..... An event to remember!

In connection with The Hall, the next project to be undertaken was the Car Park and under the Chairmanship of Harold Frost, the £1,600 was raised by local effort and grant, and a splendid car park was laid.

Since the New Hall opened, it has been in constant use as documented in letters written by Section Secretaries. It has been used for pleasure and for instruction, for people of all ages living in the vicinity. It is also used in entertaining those who live in far less beautiful surroundings, and may it always continue this work.

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For many years United Services have been held at Christmas and Easter at which Ministers from the Anglican and the Methodist Churches jointly officiate.

The Hall is vested in the Public Trustee and is managed by a Committee consisting of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, two representatives from each section and up to ten representatives of the Public, resulting in an active working team.



Dedication of memorial gates in August 1960 – Annie Randall, David Randall, Amy Randall, Robert Randall Goode and Geoffrey Randall

### THE LOTTERY REFURBISHMENT, 2010

In September 2009, The Hall was closed to the public in preparation for major refurbishment, paid for by villagers who took part in many fund raising events during the previous 2 years and by generous grants from The People's Millions, The Big Lottery and Welcome to Our Future.

On April 24<sup>th</sup> 2010, The Hall was officially reopened. The occasion was marked by a “Past, Present and Future” public display during the afternoon, followed by a Rowney Green Players Revue in the evening.